

Alberta's irrigation growers warned to watch for wheat midge

By Barb Glen



Wheat midge numbers are increasing in central Alberta. | File photo

MEDICINE HAT — Alberta's insect management team is still compiling data for the 2018 forecasts, but specialist Scott Meers revealed his early predictions Oct. 26 at the Farming Smarter Cypress Conference.

Forecast maps for wheat midge and wheat stem sawfly are expected to be posted in December, and maps for the other five insects regularly monitored will be posted in January.

Meers said wheat midge seems to be increasing in central Alberta but hasn't been an issue in the south, except for a few pockets several years ago around Willow Creek. However, farmers growing wheat on wheat under irrigation should pay close attention.

"We've had substantial losses in Newell County on irrigated wheat in the past," he said.

"If you're rotating well, probably not an issue, but just be warned that if you're growing a lot of wheat on irrigation, you need to pay attention to this. It may not be reflected in the forecast."

Wheat stem sawfly populations saw higher numbers this year, so it will have to be watched next year. Meers said the Willow Creek region and areas north of Leth-bridge and south of Vulcan could be hot spots, as well as the County of Forty Mile and Municipal District of Acadia.

"Grasshoppers and sawfly, lock step in dry conditions," said Meers, noting that grasshopper numbers have been slowly edging upward in those areas.

The Peace region grasshopper forecast seems to peak every other year, and Meers said his department is trying to figure out why.

"It's safe to say that we've been wrong with the grasshopper forecast in that part of the world (Peace region) for 10 years now, so whatever the grasshopper forecast says for the Peace, do the opposite," he said. "Down here (in the south), it's pretty reliable."

Bertha armyworm hasn't been an issue in the province since 2015, though Meers said he is expecting a resurgence.

Cold and bare ground kills the pest in chinook country, but other regions don't often experience that over winter.

"I think we're going to see more bertha armyworm next year," he said. "Where, is the question. Probably Stettler might be the centre of it."

Cereal leaf beetle was present in only low numbers this year, and beneficial insects are helping keep them under control, said Meers.

Cutworms, mainly the redback and pale western types, could do damage in the coming year, and Meers encouraged growers to pay attention to crop establishment this spring and investigate if they see anomalies.